

HOW TO... Create a handwriting font

If you're after a truly original font, look no further. Mike Bedford shows you how easy it is to make one that's based on your own handwriting

Designing a new font usually requires a degree of skill and quite a few hours of sitting at your PC. But if you fancy the idea of a font that looks like your own handwriting, things are simpler. All you need to do is scan each letter, import them into a font-editing package, tidy them up and export them as a Windows font.

We'll use a package called Font Creator from High Logic, which you can download for free from www.high-logic.com. The trial version does everything the full version can do, but you have to pay a registration fee if you want to use it beyond the 30-day trial period. You can also use this package to create any font, not just handwriting fonts, as we showed you in *Shopper* April 2005.

Before you turn to your PC, write down each character using a fairly thick black marker pen. Make your characters about an inch tall. At this size you'll be able to get around 30 on an A4 sheet of paper. Start with the upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, common punctuation marks and symbols that appear on your keyboard. If you need other characters as well, you can add them later.

1 Scan each sheet of paper into your image-editing package at about 300dpi so that each character is about 200-300 pixels tall. Make sure that each character looks OK, editing them as necessary to get rid of any unwanted smudges or holes in the characters.

Next select each character one at a time, copy it and paste it as a new file. Exactly how you do this depends on the software you're using. Save each

character into a folder called Alphabet on your hard disk as a .bmp, .gif or .jpg file. Use recognisable filenames: you can save the letters as a, b and so on, but certain characters such as ? and > will have to be named differently as Windows doesn't allow these characters in filenames.

2 Start Font Creator and select New... from the File menu to create a new font. Type My Handwriting as the Font family name in the dialog box and click OK. This will be the name of the font as it appears in other programs. A window showing the new font appears. It contains a separate box for each of the characters (known as glyphs), but initially all the glyphs are shown in pale blue to indicate that they haven't yet been defined.

3 Double-click on the pale blue letter A. The glyph-editing dialog box appears but it's empty since the character hasn't been defined yet. Go to the Tools menu, Import Image and then click the Load button in the box that appears. Double-click on the name of the file you created for the letter A and then click Generate. For now, just use the default settings on the Import Image dialog box. You can experiment with the controls later if necessary.

4 Glyphs must be the right size and in the right position, but fortunately there are guides to help you get it right. A glyph should be positioned between the horizontal solid black lines at the top and bottom, and should sit on

the horizontal red line. Only the descenders of lower-case letters such as y, g and j go below this line. Glyphs should also fit between the vertical dotted black lines to the left and right, although these lines can be repositioned to fit the glyphs. Doing so defines how much space each glyph needs, so that the letter W is given more space on the page than the letter I, for example.

Your scanned letter probably won't be the right size or in the correct position, so you'll need to scale and move it. Select the glyph by clicking and dragging a box around it. You can then scale it by dragging the resize handles that appear and move it by dragging the glyph itself. Click a selected glyph and the resize handles turn into rotate and skew handles. When you've finished, close the window and repeat the process for all the other characters.

5 As you build up your font it's a good idea to try it out. Click the Font menu and select Test. A window previewing all the characters will appear. Try the font at different sizes to get an idea of how effective it is. Click on the Close icon when you've finished.

6 When you have perfected your font, click File, Save, give it a name and location and click OK. Finally, install it so that Windows will recognise it. Click the Font menu and select Install. Click on Next and then Finish in the dialog box that appears. Now if you start Word or any common Windows application you'll find your new font listed among the others, ready for use.

